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COMMISSIONER  
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COMMERCE COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEES:  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS, TRADE, AND  
CONSUMER PROTECTION  
ENERGY AND POWER

96-45

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

April 30, 1997

The Honorable Reed E. Hundt, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, N.W. Room 814  
Washington, D.C. 20554

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Federal Communications Commission  
Office of Secretary

Dear Chairman Hundt:

We are writing you to express the strong support of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for universal service funding to connect schools and libraries to the information highway. Access to computers is a high priority to the CBC agenda.

The children of our nation are our most precious resource, and their educational development is critical to our national security. Unfortunately, children in rural areas and in under-resourced communities are on the verge of being shut out from access to the information highway, the gateway to their development.

Studies show that by the year 2000, 60 percent of all jobs will require the ability to use a computer. While 62 percent of schools serving students from relatively higher income families provided access to the Internet at school, only 31 percent of schools serving a large proportion of students from poor families provided similar access. Eight-two percent (82%) of high school students from the most affluent families had access to computers at home, while only 14 percent of poorer high school students had computers at home.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) must take affirmative steps to ensure that small schools, rural schools, schools in the poorest areas of our country, and schools with large minority populations have access to the information highway and technology-based learning. This is critical since the Thomas Rivera Center in its study of Latinos and Information Technology found that schools are the primary gateway to technology for Hispanic and African American children.

When Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996, it recognized this critical problem and mandated a universal service policy. The Act requires the FCC to provide discounts to schools, libraries, and rural health centers for access to telecommunications services. On November 7, 1996, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, established by the Act, made recommendations to implement universal service, including:

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1) establishing a discounted rate from 20-90 percent, to connect schools and libraries to telecommunications services. Eligible services would include Internet access, internal connections, installation and maintenance;

2) creating a Universal Service fund of \$2.25 billion a year to connect schools and libraries. Th funding would be derived from fees paid by telecommunication service providers;

By May 8, 1997, these recommendations will be voted on by the FCC for final approval.


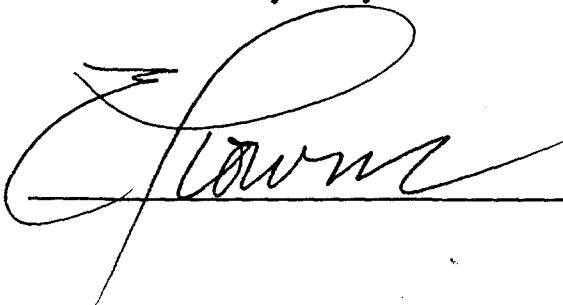
The Congressional Black Caucus strongly endorses the Universal Service Federal-State Joint Board recommendations for connecting our classrooms and libraries. Funding to link our schools and libraries to the Internet must be implemented immediately. Given the existing access gaps, our children and communities cannot afford a moment's delay in getting on the information highway.

As we approach the end of this century, we are at a pivotal time in the development of our Nation. The challenges that we face as a Nation in ensuring that every child has access to advanced telecommunications in school are as profound as the challenges we faced early in this century when our Nation set about the task of ensuring free public education to every school-aged child in America. This challenge is a legacy of the battle we fought in the middle of this century to integrate the public schools. Like those pivotal times, we can choose a policy of opportunity and hope for all of our Nation' children, or we can perpetuate divisions.

We have a common goal: to ensure that children in rural and under-resourced areas of our country have every tool and every opportunity to learn and to contribute to America's future. We are proud to support universal service connection for our classrooms, schools, and libraries.

We will be happy to discuss this vital issue of importance to our children and to our communities with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,



~~Reed E. Hundt~~ Hundt, Reed E.

~~James H. Miller~~ James H. Miller

~~Robert D. Hastings~~ Robert D. Hastings

~~Wm. M. Clayton~~

~~Joseph D. Ho~~

~~Albert R. Gurn~~ Albert R. Gurn

~~Donald W. Payne~~

~~Melanie Waters~~

~~Tom A. Long~~

~~Elizabeth E. Cummings~~

~~James E. Clayburn~~

~~John W. C. Smith~~

~~Danny L. Davis~~

~~William L. Clay~~

~~John A. O'Connell~~

~~Julian C. Cook~~

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Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Senator Conrad Burns, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation

Representative Thomas J. Bliley, Chairman  
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Representative W.J. Tauzin, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade, and Consumer Protection

Federal Communications Commission Federal-State Joint Board Members

Secretary Richard Riley, U.S. Department of Education